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2 PRIZES OF 10,000 are 20,000
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25 PRIZES OF 1,000 are 25,000
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APPROXIMATION PRIZES.
100 Prizes of \$500 approximating to \$50,000
100 Prizes of \$250 approximating to \$25,000
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Jan 12-88

SHE
A History of Adventure
By J. RIDER HAGGARD.

CHAPTER XIV.
A SOUL IN TORMENT.
It was nearly 10 o'clock at night when I cast myself down upon my bed and began to gather my scattered wits, and reflect upon what I had seen and heard. But the more I reflected the less I could make of it. Was I mad, or drunk, or dreaming, or was I merely the victim of a gigantic and most elaborate hoax? How was it possible that I, a rational man, not unacquainted with the leading scientific facts of our history, and hitherto an absolute and utter disbeliever in all the hocus-pocus that in Europe goes by the name of the supernatural, could believe that I had within the last few minutes been engaged in conversation with a woman 2,000 and odd years old! The thing was contrary to the experience of human nature, and absolutely and utterly impossible. Nonsense; it must be nonsense. She had warned me fairly and I had refused to take the warning. Curses on the fatal curiosity that is ever prompting man to draw the veil from woman, and curses on the natural impulse that begets it! I, at my age, to fall a victim to this modern Circe! But then she was not modern; at least she said not. She was almost as ancient as the original Circe.

I tore my hair, and jumped up off my couch, feeling that if I did not do something I should also go off my head. What did she mean about the scarabæus, too! It was Leo's scarabæus, and had come out of the old coffin that Vinay had left in my room, nearly twenty years before. Could it be, after all, that the whole story was true, and the writing on the shroud was not a forgery, or the invention of some crack-brained, long-forgotten individual? And if so, could it be that Leo was the man that she was waiting for—the dead man who was to be born again! Impossible again. The whole thing was gibberish; who ever heard of a man being born again!

Next I thought of the fact that I had not been to see how Leo was, so taking up one of the lamps that burned away at my bedside I slipped off my shoes and crept down the passage to the entrance of his cave. The draught of light air was lifting his curtain to and fro gently, as though spirit hands were drawing and redrawing it. I did into the vault like apartment and looked. There was a light in it, and Leo was lying on the couch, tossing restlessly in his fever, but asleep. By his side, half lying on the floor, half leaning against the stone couch, was Ustane. She held his hand in one of hers, but she too was dozing, and the two made a pretty, or rather a pathetic picture. Poor Leo! his cheek was burning red, there were dark shadows beneath his eyes, and his breath came heavily. He was very, very ill; and again the horrible fear seized me that he might die, and I be left alone in the world. And yet if he lived he would perhaps be my rival with Aysha; even if he were not the man that chance should I, middle aged and hirsute, have against his bright youth and beauty! Well, thank heaven! my sense of right was not dead. She had not killed that yet; and, as I stood there, I prayed to the Almighty in my heart that my boy, my more than son, might live, ay, even if he proved to be the man.

Then I went back as softly as I had come, but still I could not sleep, the sight and thought of dear Leo lying there so ill had but added fuel to the fire of my unrest. My weary body and overstrained mind had awakened all my imagination into preternatural activity. Ideas, visions, almost inspirations, flooded before it with startling vividness. Most of them were grotesque enough, some were ghastly, some recalled thoughts and sensations that had for years been buried in the debris of my past life. But behind and above them all hovered the shape of that awful woman, and through them gleamed the memory of her entrancing loveliness. Up and down the cave I strode—up and down.

as ours was, to have passages running into men's bed chambers from no one knows where. If there are passages people can come up there; they can come up when one is asleep. Partly to see where it went to and partly from a restless desire to be doing something, I followed the passage. It led to a stone stair, which I descended; the stair ended in another passage, or rather tunnel, also hewn out of the rock, exactly beneath the passage that led to the entrance of our rooms and across the great central cave. I went on down it; it was as silent as the grave, but still, drawn by some sensation or attraction that I cannot describe, I followed on, my stockinged feet falling without a noise on the smooth and rocky floor. When I had traversed some fifty yards of space I came to another passage, running at right angles, and here an awful thing happened to me—the sharp draught caught my lamp and extinguished it, leaving me in utter darkness in the bowels of that mysterious place. I took a couple of strides forward so as to clear the blinding tunnel, being terribly afraid lest I should turn up in the dark if I once got confused as to the direction, and then paused to think. What was I to do? I had no match; it seemed awful to attempt that long journey back through the utter gloom, and yet I could not stand there all night, and if I did, probably it would not help me much, for in the bowels of the rock it would be as dark at midday as at midnight. I looked back over my shoulder—not a sight or a sound. I peered forward down the darkness; surely far away I saw something like the faint glow of fire. Perhaps it was a cave where I could get a light—at any rate it was worth investigating. Slowly and painfully I crept along the tunnel, keeping my hand against its wall and feeling at every step with my foot before I put it down, fearing lest I should fall into some pit. Thirty paces—there was a light, a flickering light shining through curtains. Fifty paces—it was close at hand! Sixty—oh, great heaven!

I was at the curtains, and they did not hang close, so I could see clearly into the little cavern beyond them. It had all the appearance of being a tomb, and was lit up by a fire that burned in its center with a whitish flame and without smoke. Indeed, there to the left was a stone shelf with a little ledge to it three inches or so high, and on the shelf lay what I took to be a corpse; at any rate, it looked like one with something white thrown over it. To the right was a similar shelf, on which lay some broadened coverings. Over the fire burnt the figure of a woman; she was sideways to me and facing the corpse, wrapped in a dark mantle that hid her like a nun's cloak. She seemed to be staring at the flickering flame. Suddenly, as I was trying to make up my mind what to do, with a convulsive movement that somehow gave an impression of despairing energy, the woman rose to her feet and cast the dark cloak from her.

It was she herself. She was clothed, as I had seen her when she unveiled in the kirtle of clinging white, cut low upon her bosom, and bound in at the waist with the barbaric double-headed snake, and, as before, her rippling black hair fell in heavy masses down her back. But her face was what caught my eye, and held me as in a vise, not this time by the force of her beauty, but by the power of fascinated terror. The beauty was still there, indeed, but the agony, the blind passion and the awful vindictiveness displayed upon those quivering features, and in the tortured look of the upturned eyes, were such as surpass any power of description. For a moment she stood still, her hands raised high above her head, and as she did so the white robe slipped from her down to her golden girdle, baring the blinding loveliness of her form. She stood there, her fingers clinched, and the awful look of malice gathered and deepened on her face.

Down came the clinched hands to her sides, then up again above her head, and, as I am a living and honorable man, the flame of the fire leaped up after them, almost to the roof, throwing a fierce and vivid glare upon her herself, upon the white figure beneath the covering, and every scroll and detail on the rock work.

Down came the ivory arms again, and as they did so she spoke, or rather hissed, in Arabic, in a note that curled my blood, and for a second stopped my heart.

"Curse her! may she be everlastingly accursed!"

The arms fell and the flames sunk. Up they went again, and the broad tongue of fire shot up after them; then again they fell.

"Curse her memory! accursed be the memory of the Egyptian!"

Up again, and again down.

"Curse her, the fair daughter of the Nile, because of her beauty!"

"Curse her! because her magic has prevailed against me!"

"Curse her! because she has kept my beloved from me!"

Again the flame fell, and again she covered her eyes with her hands.

"It's no use—no use," she wailed; "who can reach those who sleep! Not even I can reach them."

Then once more she began her unholy rites. "Curse her when she shall be born again! Let her be born accursed!"

"Let her be utterly accursed from the hour of her birth until sleep finds her!"

Yes, then let her be accursed, for then shall I overtake her with my vengeance, and utterly destroy her!"

while her whole frame became rigid and terrible to see and her eyes grew fixed and dull. I shrank in horror behind the curtain, my hair stood up upon my head, and whether it was my imagination or a fact I am unable to say, but I thought that the quiet form beneath the covering began to quiver and the winding sheet to lift as though it lay on the breast of one who slept. Suddenly she withdrew her hands.

"What is the use?" she said, gloomily. "Of what use is it to recall the semblances of life when I cannot recall the spirit! Even if thou stood before me thou wouldst not know me and couldst but do what I did thee. The life in thee would be my life and not thy life, Kalikrates."

For a moment she stood there, and then cast herself down on her knees beside the corpse, and began to press her lips against the sheet and weep. There was something so horrible about the sight of this forsaken woman letting loose her passion on the dead—so much more horrible even than anything that had gone before—that I could no longer bear to look at it, and turning, commenced to creep, shivering as I was in every limb, slowly along the pitch dark passage, feeling in my heart that I had a vision of a Soul in Hell.

On I stumbled, I scarcely know how. Twice fell; once I turned up the blinding passage, but fortunately found out my mistake in time. Twenty minutes or more I crept along, till at last it occurred to me that I must have passed the little stair by which I descended. So, utterly exhausted and nearly frightened to death, I sunk down at length there on the stone flooring, and into oblivion.

When I came to I noticed a faint ray of light in the passage just behind me. I crept to it and found it was the little stair, down which the weak dawn was stealing. Picking up, I gained my chamber in safety, and flinging myself on the couch, was soon lost in slumber, or rather stupor.

CHAPTER XV.
AYSHA GIVES JUDGMENT.

The next thing that I remember was opening my eyes and perceiving the form of Job, who had now practically recovered from his attack of fever. He was standing in the ray of light that pierced into the cave from the outer air, shaking out my clothes as a makeshift for brushing them, which he could not do because there was no brush, and then folding them up neatly and laying them on the foot of the stone couch. This done, he got up and opened the door of the Gladiolus and I stepped out of the cave.

After I had dressed myself I passed into the eating, or rather embowering, chamber, and had some food, which was, as before, brought to me by the girl mutes. When I had finished I went and saw poor Leo, who was quite off his head and did not even know me. I asked Ustane how she thought he was, but she only shook her head and began to cry a little. Evidently her hopes were small, and I then and there made up my mind that, if it were in any way possible, I would get She to come and see him. Surely She would cure him if She chose; at any rate, She said She could. Whilst I was in the room Billal entered, and also shook his head.

"He will die at night," he said.

"God forbid, my father," I answered, and turned away with a heavy heart.

"She who must be obeyed" commands thy presence, my Baboon," said the old man as we got to the curtain; "but, oh, my dear son, be more careful. Yesterday I made sure in my heart that She would blast thee when thou didst not crawl upon thy stomach before her. She is sitting in the great hall to do justice upon those who would have smitten thee and the Lion. Come on, my son; come swiftly."

I turned, and followed him down the passage, and when we reached the great central cave saw that many Amahaggers, some robed and some merely clad in the sweet simplicity of a leopard skin, were hurrying up it. We mingled with the throng, and walked up the enormous and indeed almost interminable cave. All the way up it the walls were elaborately sculptured, and every twenty paces or so passages opened out of it at right angles, leading, Billal told me, to tombs hallowed in the rock by the people who were before."

"Nobly visited those tombs now," he said; "I must say that my heart rejoiced when I thought of the opportunities of antiquarian research that opened out before me."

At last we came to the head of the cave, where there was a rock dais almost exactly similar to the one on which we had been so furiously attacked, a fact that proved to me that these dais must have been used as altars, probably for the celebration of religious ceremonies, and more especially of rites connected with the interment of the dead. On either side of this dais were passages leading, Billal informed me, to other caves full of dead bodies. "Indeed," he added, "the whole mountain is full of dead, and nearly all of them are perfect."

In front of the dais were gathered a great number of people of both sexes, who stood glancing about in their peculiar gloomy fashion, which would have reduced Mark Tapscott himself to misery in a few minutes. On the dais was a rude chair of black wood inlaid with ivory, with a seat made of grass fibre and a footstool formed of a wooden slab attached to the chair.

Suddenly there was a cry of "Hilya! Hilya!" ("She! She!") and the entire crowd instantly precipitated itself upon the ground and lay there as though they were individually and collectively stricken dead, leaving me standing up like some solitary survivor of a massacre. As they did so a long string of guards began to defile from a passage to the left and ranged themselves on either side of the dais. Then followed about a score of male mutes, then as many women mutes bearing lamps, and then a tall white figure, swathed from head to foot, in whom I recognized She herself. She mounted the dais and sat down upon the chair, and spoke to me in Greek—I suppose because she did not wish those present to understand what she said.

"Come hither, Hilya," she said, "and sit at my feet and see me do justice on those who would have slain thee. Forgive me if my Greek doth halt like a lame man; it is so long since I have heard the sound of it that my tongue is stiff and will not bend to the words."

I bowed, and mounting the dais sat down at her feet.

"How didst thou sleep, my Hilya?" she asked.

"I slept not well, O Aysha!" I answered with perfect truth and with an inward fear that perhaps she knew how I had passed the hours of the night.

"To get a view of us with one eye. It seemed that they were willing to undergo this inconvenience and even greater risks to have the opportunity of looking on her—or rather on her garments, for no living man there except myself had ever seen her face. At last we caught sight of the waving of lights and heard the tramp of men coming along the passage, and in filed the guard, and with them the survivors of our would be murderers, to the number of a score or more, on whose countenances the natural expression of sullenness struggled with the terror that evidently filled their savage hearts. They were ranged in front of the dais and would have cast like soldiers down on the floor of the cave like the spectators, but she stopped them.

"Say," she said in her softest voice, "stand! I pray ye stand. Perhaps the time shall soon be when ye shall grow weary of being stretched out?" and she laughed merrily.

I saw a pair of terror run along the rank of the poor doomed wretches, and, winked villains as they were, I felt sorry for them. Some minutes, perhaps two or three, passed before anything fresh occurred, during which She appeared, from the movement of her eyes—for, of course, we could not see her eyes—by slowly and carefully examining each delinquent. At last she spoke, addressing herself to me in a quiet and deliberate tone:

"Dost thou, O my guest, who art known in thy country by the name of the Pricely Tree, recognize these men?"

"Ay, O queen, nearly all of them," I said; and I saw them glower at me as I said it.

"Then tell me and this company the tale whereof I have heard."

Thus adjured, I, in as few words as I could, related the history of the cannibal feast, and of the attempted torture of our poor servant. The narrative was received in perfect silence, both by the accused and by the audience, and also by She herself. When I had done, Aysha called upon Billal by name, and lifting his head from the ground, but without rising, the old man confirmed my story. No further evidence was taken.

"Ye have heard," said She at length, in a cold, clear voice, very different from her usual tones; indeed, it was one of the most remarkable things about this extraordinary creature that her voice had the power of silencing itself in a wonderful manner to the mood of the moment. "What have ye to say, ye rebellious children, why vengeance should not be done upon ye?"

For some time there was no answer, but at last one of the men, a fine, broad-chested fellow, well on in middle life, with a graven features and an eye like a hawk's, spoke, and said that the orders that they had received were not to harm the white man; nothing was said of their black servant, so, egged on thereby by a woman who was now dead, they proceeded to try to hot pot him after the ancient and honorable custom of their country, with a view of eating him in due course. As for their attack upon ourselves, it was made in an access of sudden fury, and they deeply regretted it. He ended, by humbly praying that mercy might be extended to them, or at least that they might be banished into the swamps, to live or die as it might chance; but I saw on his face that he had but little hope of mercy.

Then came a pause, and the most intense silence reigned over the whole scene, which, illuminated as it was by the flickering lamps that stood on the breast patterns of light and shadow upon the rocky walls, was as strange a one as I ever saw, even in that weird land. There, seated in her barbaric chair above them all, with myself at her feet, was the veiled white woman, whose awesome power seemed to shine about her like a halo. Never have I seen her veiled shape look more terrible than it did in that space, while she gathered herself up, as it were, for vengeance.

"Dogs and serpents," She began in a low voice that gradually gathered power as she went on, till the place rang with it, "eaters of human flesh, two things have ye done. First, ye have attacked these strangers, being white men, and would have slain their servant, and for that alone death is your reward. But that is not all. Ye have dared to disobey me. Did I not send my word unto ye by Billal, my servant, and the father of your household? Hath it not been taught to ye from childhood that the law of She is an ever fixed law, and that he who breaketh it by so much as a jot or tittle shall perish? And is not my lighter word a law? Have not your fathers taught ye this, I say, whilst as yet ye were but children? Well do ye know it, ye wicked ones. But ye are all evil—evil to the core; the wickedness bubbles up in ye like a fountain in the spring time. And now because ye have done this thing, because ye have striven to put these men, my guests, to death, and yet more because ye have dared to disobey my word, this is the doom that I doom ye to: That ye be taken to the cave of torture, and given over to the torturers to wreak their will upon ye, and that on the going down of to-morrow's sun those of ye who yet remain alive be slain by the hot pot, as ye would have slain the servant of this my guest."

She ceased and a faint murmur of horror ran round the cave. As for the victims, as soon as they realized the full hideousness of their doom their stoicism forsook them, and they flung themselves down upon the ground and wept and implored for mercy in a way that was almost to be pitied. I too, turned to Aysha and begged her to spare them, or at least to muffle out their fate in some less awful way. But she was hard as adamant about it.

"My Hilya," she said, again speaking in Greek, which, to tell the truth, although I have always been considered as good a scholar of the language as most, I found it rather difficult to follow, chiefly because of the change in the fall of the accent—Aysha, of course, talked with the accent of her contemporaries, whereas we have only tradition and the modern accent to guide us as to the exact pronunciation—"my Hilya, it cannot be. Were I to show mercy to those whose lives would not be safe among these wolves for a day. Thou knowest them not. They are tigers to lap blood, and even now they hunger after your lives. How thinkest thou that I rule this people? I have but a regiment of guards to do my bidding; therefore it is not by force. It is by terror. Nay, the men must die, and die as I have said."

Then turning suddenly to the captain of the guard, "My word is spoken—let my doom be done."

CHAPTER XVI.
THE TOMBS OF KOR.

After the prisoners had been removed, Aysha waved her hand, and the spectators turned round and began to crawl off down the cave like a scattered flock of sheep. When they got a fair distance from the dais, however, they rose and walked away, leaving the queen and myself alone, with the exception of the mutes and a few guards, most of the latter having departed with the doomed men. Thinking this a good opportunity, I asked She to come and see Leo, telling her of his serious condition; but she would not, saying that he certainly would not die before the night, as people never died of that sort of fever except at nightfall or dawn. Also she said that it would be better to let the fever spend its course as much as possible before she cured it. Accordingly I was rising to leave when she bade me follow her, as she would talk with me and show me the wonders of the caves.

I was too much involved in the web of her

fatal fascinations to say her no, even if I had wished to, which I did not. She rose from her chair, and, making some steps to the right, descended from the dais. Thereon four of the girls took lamps, and ranged themselves two in front and two behind us, but the others went away.

"Now," she said, "wouldst thou see some of the wonders of this place, O Hilya? Look upon this great cave. Saw ye ever the like? Yet was it, and many more like it, hallowed by the hands of the dead race that once lived here in the city on the plain. A great and a wonderful people must they have been, these men of Kor; but, like the Egyptians, they thought more of the dead than the living. How many men, think ye, working for how many years, did it require to hollow out this cave and all the galleries thereof?"

"Tens of thousands," I answered.

"So, O Hilya. This people was an old people before the Egyptians were. A little can I read of their inscriptions, having found the key thereto—and, see, here, this was one of the last of the caves that they dug; and turning to the rock behind her, she motioned the mutes to hold up the lamps. Carven over the dais was the figure of an old man seated in a chair, with an ivory rod in his hand. It struck me that his features were exceedingly like those of the man who was represented as being embalmed in the chamber where we took our meals. Beneath the chair—which, by the way, was shaped exactly like the one in which Aysha had sat to give judgment—was a short inscription in the extraordinary characters of which I have already spoken, but which I do not remember sufficient of to illustrate. It looked more like Chinese writing than any other that I am acquainted with. This inscription Aysha proceeded, with some difficulty and hesitation, to read aloud and translate. It ran as follows:

"In the year 4350 from the founding of the city of Imperial Kor was this cave for burial places completed by Tiano, king of Kor, the people thereof and their slaves having labored thereat for three generations, to be a tomb for their citizens of rank who shall come after. May the blessing of a cloud settle upon their work, and make the sleep of Tiano, the mighty monarch, the likeness of whose features is graven above, a sound and happy sleep till the day of awakening, and also the sleep of his servants, and of those of his race, who, rising up after him, shall yet lay their heads as low!"

"Thou seest, O Hilya," she said, "this people founded the city of which the ruins yet number the plain round, 4,000 years before this cave was finished. Yet what first I saw it, 2,000 years ago, was it even as it is now. Judge, therefore, how old must the place have been! And now follow thou me, and I will show thee after what fashion this great city fell when the time was come for it to fall; and she led the way down to the center of the cave, and stopped at a spot where a round rock had been let into a sort of large man hole in the flooring, accurately filling it just as the iron plates fill the spaces in the London pavements down which the coals are thrown. "Thou seest," she said, "tell me, what is it?"

"Nay, I know not," I answered; whereon she crossed to the left hand side of the cave (looking toward the entrance), and hid the mutes hold up the lamps. On the wall opposite was painted with a red pigment in similar characters to those hewn beneath the sculpture of Tiano, king of Kor. This she proceeded to translate to me, the pigment still being quite fresh enough to show the form of the letters.

"I, Junia, a priest of the great Temple of Kor, write this upon the rock in the year 4003 from the founding of Kor. Kor is fallen. No more shall the mighty feast in her halls; no more shall she rule the world, and her navies go out to commerce with the world. Kor is fallen; and her mighty works, and all the cities of Kor, and all the harbors that she built and the canals that she made are for the wolf and the owl and the wild swan, and the barbarian who comes after. Twenty and five moons ago did a cloud settle upon Kor, and the hundred cities of Kor, and all of the cloud came a pestilence that slew her people, old and young, one with another, and spared not. One with another they turned black and died—the young and the old, the rich and the poor, the man and the woman, the prince and the slave. The pestilence slew and slew, and ceased not by day or by night, and those who escaped from the pestilence were slain of the famine. No longer could the bodies of the children of Kor be preserved according to the ancient rites, because of the number of the dead; therefore were they hurled into the great pit beneath the cave, through the hole in the cave. Then, at last, a remnant of this the great people, the light of the whole world, went down to the coast and took ship and sailed northward; and now am I, the priest of Junia, who write this, the last man left alive out of this great city of men, but whether there be any yet left in the other cities I know not. This I write in misery of heart before I die, because Kor the Imperial is no more, and because there are none to worship in her temple, and all her palaces are empty, and her princes and her traders and her fair women have passed off the face of the earth."

I gave a sigh of astonishment, the utter desolation depicted in this rude scrawl was so overpowering. It was terrible to think of this solitary survivor of a mighty people recording its fate before he, too, went down into darkness. What must the old man have felt as, in ghastly, terrifying solitude, by the light of one lamp feebly illumining a little space of gloom, he in a few, brief lines sketched the history of his nation's death upon the cavern wall! What a subject for the moralist, or the painter, or, indeed, for any one who can think!

I followed her on to a side passage opening out of the main cave, then down a great number of steps and along an underground shaft that could not have been less than sixty feet beneath the surface of the rock, and was ventilated by curious openings that ran upward. I do not know where. Suddenly the passage ended, and she halted, and bade the mutes hold up the lamps, and I saw such a scene as I am not likely to see again. We were standing in an enormous pit, or rather on the edge of it, for it went down deeper—I don't know how much—than where we were, and was edged in with a low wall of rock. So far as I could judge the pit was about the size of the space beneath the dome of St. Paul's; and when the lamps were held up I saw that it was nothing but one vast charnel house, being literally full of thousands of human skeletons, which lay piled up in an enormous gleaming pyramid, formed by the slipping down of the bodies from the apex as fresh ones were dropped in from above. Anything more appalling than this jumbled mass of the remains of a departed race I cannot imagine, and what made it ever more dreadful was that in this dry air a good number of the bodies had simply become desiccated, with the skin on them, and now, fixed in every conceivable position, stared at one out of the openings of white bones, grotesquely horrible caricatures of humanity. In my astonishment I made an ejaculation, and the echoes of my voice ringing in the vaulted place disturbed a skull that had been accurately balanced for many thousands of years near the apex of the pile. Down it came with a run, bounding along merrily toward us, and of course bringing an avalanche of other bones after it, till at last the whole place rattled with their movement, as though the skeletons were getting up to greet us.